



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement in Response to Head of the OSCE Mission in Croatia, Ambassador Peter Semneby**

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Paul W. Jones  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 25, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We also welcome Ambassador Semneby here today and thank him for his report. We also want to thank him once again for his and his team's gracious assistance during Ambassador Minikes' recent visit to Croatia. The Government of Croatia also was extremely welcoming and open, for which we'd like to thank Assistant Foreign Minister Vidosevic and Ambassador Matek.

Mr. Chairman, as Ambassador Semneby has indicated both in his report here and in the "Status Report" issued earlier this week, there has been significant progress in Croatia in several areas related to the Mission's mandate.

For example, on the issue of refugee return, the new awareness raising campaign aimed at providing refugees information on assistance available to them, combined with concrete programs for reconstruction assistance and property return, is showing results. We support the continued focus of the OSCE Mission in assisting the Government of Croatia with setting a strong framework to allow those who wish to return to do so. Several areas still need more attention, including occupancy and tenancy rights as well as implementation of programs at the local level. We look forward to the establishment of clear benchmarks for the Government of Croatia, which must include creating a welcoming environment to allow all those refugees who wish to return to peacefully and successfully integrate, and a regional road map for closure of the refugee file.

Croatia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has increased. Some war crimes cases are being tried in domestic Croatian courts, although there are indications of ethnic biases in the conduct of the cases. Judicial reform is still needed, and we support the work of the Mission on assisting with judicial reform, including by monitoring domestic war crimes trials. We continue to call on the Government of Croatia to bring ICTY indictee Gotovina to trial in The Hague. Croatia's complete integration into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations is dependent on Gotovina's transfer to the ICTY.

The law on the rights of national minorities provides a good framework for minority participation in the political life of Croatia, particularly at the local level. More remains to be done, however, to bring more minorities into the police, the judiciary, and State administration. We support the Mission's continued focus on this issue.

Last week's visit by Prime Minister Sanander to Belgrade was a very positive and historic landmark in Croatia's regional relations. We look forward to increased regional cooperation on common issues such as refugee return.

We support continued focus by the Mission on the development of the media in Croatia. We are concerned that prison sentences are still being given to journalists in defamation cases, and hope that Croatia will decriminalize libel.

We also support continued focus on electoral reform, both by the Mission and ODIHR. We note the roundtable on electoral reform that took place in Zagreb last week, and hope that, in view of the 2005 presidential and local elections, the Government of Croatia will take into consideration ODIHR's recommendations, particularly concerning the reform of the electoral legislation.

We thank Ambassador Semneby for the information on the restructuring of the Mission and on the priorities he plans for the Mission next year. We believe the Mission, like Croatia, is on the right track and look forward to even more progress in 2005.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.